Summary Report

2002 NWT School Tobacco Survey

Northwest Territories Health and Social Services

January 2004

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The consulting firm Northern Research and Evaluation conducted the data analysis and prepared the initial draft of this report.

The Department also recognizes the assistance provided by the Bureau of Statistics, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, district education Authorities/Councils, NWT Schools and students in survey activities.

HIGHLIGHTS

Smoking has been identified as an important public health issue in the NWT. To monitor smoking behaviour among NWT youth, a series of school tobacco surveys were conducted in 1982, 1987, 1993, 1999, and 2002. This report presents the summary findings of the 2002 NWT School Tobacco Survey.

Who Smokes?

- 26% of NWT youth between the ages of 10 and 17 were current smokers at the time of the survey. This is well above the national rate of 19% for youth.
- There was no significant decrease in the rate of youth smoking from the previous survey of 1999.
- The number of daily smokers rises dramatically from 4% of current smokers in the 10-14 year age group to 23% of current smokers age 15-17.
- 39% of youth in the smaller communities were current smokers, compared to 28% of youth in the regional centres and 15% of youth in Yellowknife.
- More aboriginal youth smoke regardless of community size.
- More females smoke than males, a pattern which is seen in all sub-age groups.

How Much Do Youth Smoke?

- Youth daily smokers smoked an average of 7.2 cigarettes per day in 2002, which was lower than the 9.1 cigarettes smoked per day in 1999.

When Do Youth Become Daily Smokers?

- The average age that youth reported starting to smoke cigarettes daily was 12.9 years.

Where Do Youth Get Cigarettes?

- 42% of youth purchased their cigarettes in stores, despite it being illegal under federal law for them to do so.
- 46% of youth reported that the store clerks had not asked their ages prior to the attempted purchase of tobacco, which was down from the 62% reported in 1999.

Do Youth Use Chewing Tobacco and Snuff?

- Less than 1% of youth were using chewing tobacco or snuff at the time of the survey, a small drop from the rate reported in 1999.

Youth Views on Smoking

- A large majority of youth acknowledged the addictive nature of tobacco and the harmful health effects of smoking and second-hand smoke. However, a significant number of youth believed that:
  - smokers can quit anytime they want (29%); and
  - people have to smoke for many years before it will hurt their health (23%).
- Female smokers were more knowledgeable about the harmful health effects of smoking and the addictive nature of tobacco, yet they also believed that it was easy to quit and that smoking helps you to stay slim.

Quitting Smoking

- Many youth try to quit smoking – 59% of current smokers in the 15-17 year age range attempted to quit in the past six months.
- As is the case nationally, NWT youth are not very successful at quitting. The NWT quit rate in the 15 -17 year age group is only 8%.

Non-Smokers Views on Whether They Would Smoke This Year

- Less than 6% of current non-smokers thought that they would probably start smoking while 11% did not know whether they would smoke or not.

School Tobacco Education Programs

- 68% of youth reported that they had been taught in school in the past year about the health problems caused by smoking.
- 66% of youth reported that they had been taught in school in the past year how to say "no" to tobacco.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

BACKGROUND 1

HOW THE SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED AND ANALYSED 2

YOUTH TOBACCO USE 3

Who Smokes? 3

How Much Do Daily Smokers Smoke? 6

When Do Youth Become Daily Smokers? 6

Where Do Youth Get Cigarettes 7

Do Youth Use Chewing Tobacco and Snuff? 8

YOUTH BELIEFS ABOUT SMOKING 8

Views on Smoking 8

Views on Why Youth Start to Smoke 10

Parents Smoking Behaviour 11

QUITTING SMOKING AND SMOKING INTENTION 12

Current Smokers Who Tried to Quit in the Past Six Months 12

Reasons for Quitting 13

Non-Smokers Views on Whether They Would Smoke This Year 13

Smoking One Year From Now 14

SCHOOL TOBACCO EDUCATION PROGRAMS 15

The Facts About Smoking 15

How to Say "No" to Tobacco 16

CONCLUSION 17

APPENDIX I: DEFINITIONS 19

INTRODUCTION

Smoking has been identified as an important public health issue in the NWT. Over two decades of study on tobacco use in the NWT – including *Smoke Alarm: A Summary Report on Smoking in the Northwest Territories* and *The NWT Health Status Report 1999* – show that the NWT has some of the highest smoking rates in Canada, particularly in youth.

To monitor smoking behaviour among NWT youth, a series of school tobacco surveys were conducted in 1982, 1987, 1993, 1999 and 2002. This report presents the summary findings of the *2002 NWT School Tobacco Survey*, which includes:

- tobacco use among youth in the NWT;
- youth beliefs about smoking;
- quitting smoking and smoking intention; and
- school tobacco education programs.

Detailed definitions of the various classifications of smoker (current, former, never, etc.) are contained in Appendix I.

BACKGROUND

The Government of the NWT (GNWT) and particularly the Department of Health and Social Services have undertaken a wide variety of actions to address the public health issue of smoking within the NWT.

One major action undertaken was the development of a territorial strategy on tobacco. *Action on Tobacco* was developed in 2002 and is currently being implemented. The strategy has four main areas of focus:

- prevent tobacco use by ensuring that people who do not smoke never take up smoking;
- protect people, especially children, from second-hand smoke (also known as environmental tobacco smoke);
- help and support people who want to stop smoking; and
- change attitudes about smoking so people see it as an unhealthy and undesirable behaviour (de-normalization).

More recent activities supporting the strategy include:

- developing tobacco legislation to bring the NWT into line with other provincial jurisdictions (all of which have some form of tobacco control legislation in place) – elements being considered for the NWT legislation include:
  - promotion, advertising and sponsorship;
  - point of sale; and
  - smoking in public and workplaces;

- development tobacco content within the NWT school health curriculum – pilot testing of the tobacco units is occurring, with NWT-wide implementation scheduled for the Fall of 2004;
- implementing a mass media campaign aimed at de-normalizing smoking as an accepted social behaviour – this advertising campaign will target youth and will complement both the Action on Tobacco initiatives and the school health curriculum;
- holding youth conferences (*BLAST: Building Leadership for Action in Schools Today*) where kids teach kids the dangers of tobacco, and youth representatives then return to their home communities to pass on their knowledge to their classmates; and
- introducing non-smoking by-laws or policies by community governments to prohibit smoking in public places such as restaurants, stores, arenas, municipal buildings, etc.

Other supporting activities (not included under the strategy) include:

- the raising taxes on cigarettes (most recently in April of 2003) by the GNWT – raising taxes has been shown to have the desired effect of reducing tobacco use, especially among youth; and
- ensuring that all school boards to have non-smoking policies in place to discourage smoking on school property.

HOW THE SURVEY WAS CONDUCTED AND ANALYSED

The *2002 NWT School Tobacco Survey* was carried out by the NWT Bureau of Statistics, with assistance from the Department of Health and Social Services, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, the District Education Councils/Authorities, and all schools throughout the NWT with grades 5 -12. Specific contributions included:

- the survey was designed jointly by the Bureau of Statistics and Health and Social Services;
- Education, Culture and Employment provided student enrolment figures and the District Education Councils/Authorities provided administrative data on school populations;
- the Bureau of Statistics mailed out the survey to schools in October of 2002;
- students completed the survey questionnaire in class between October 28 and November 8, 2002;
- the Bureau of Statistics did the data entry; and
- Health and Social Services performed the analysis of the collected data and produced this final report.

At the time of the survey, there were approximately 5,536 students aged 10-17 enrolled in 47 schools throughout the NWT. While an attempt was made to survey all students in all schools, inevitably some did not participate. Completed surveys were received from 66% of students (3,667) and from 94% of schools (44). The resulting surveys were then "weighted" by the Bureau of Statistics so as to more accurately reflect the characteristics of the full population of students in the NWT. For example, if male students at a certain grade level at one of the District Education Councils/Authorities were under-represented within the completed surveys, a weighting factor was applied to those male responses to compensate.

Additionally, changes were made to the 2002 survey questionnaire from the one used in previous years to bring it more in line with the *National Youth Smoking Survey*. For this reason, extensive trend analysis is not presented in this report, as it is not possible to directly compare the results of the 2002 survey with the results of surveys undertaken prior to 1993 (which were un-weighted).

The overall survey results were analyzed along four main variables to look for differences within various subgroups of the total survey population. These four variables include:

- age (which was divided into three categories: 10-12 year olds; 13-14 year olds; and 15-17 year olds);
- gender (male and female students);
- ethnicity (aboriginal and non-aboriginal students); and
- community type (which was divided into three categories: Yellowknife; the regional centres of Inuvik, Fort Smith and Hay River; and all other smaller communities combined).

Additionally, the "type of smoker" was broken out into various categories, which include:

- current smokers (which includes "daily" smokers, "non-daily" smokers, and "beginning" smokers);
- former smokers (which includes "former" smokers and "past-experimenters"); and
- non-smokers (or "life-time abstainers").

See Appendix I for a more detailed definition of each of these categories.

Missing data were not reported, as they did not amount to a substantial proportion of the total (10% or more) on any given set of results. Additionally, some percentages do not total to 100 due to rounding.

YOUTH TOBACCO USE

This section of the report presents the summary findings of tobacco use amongst youth in the NWT. The topics covered include: who smokes; how much they smoke; where they get their cigarettes; and whether they use chewing tobacco or snuff.

Who Smokes?

Just over one-quarter of NWT youth (26%) were current smokers at the time of the survey, while 17% were former smokers and 56% had never smoked. This rate was roughly the same as the 27% of youth who were current smokers in 1999, but still higher than the 24% of youth who were current smokers in 1993. Additionally, this rate was higher than the national youth smoking rate of 19% as outlined in the Health Canada *1994 Youth Smoking Survey*.

There were also differences in smoking rates along age, gender, ethnicity, and community types. Smoking rates were higher amongst youth who were older, female, aboriginal, or from the smaller communities:

- 42% of 15-17 year olds were current smokers, compared to 28% of 13-14 year olds and 10% of 10-12 year olds;
- 31% of females were current smokers, compared to 21% of males;
- 36% of aboriginal youth were current smokers, compared to 13% of non-aboriginal youth; and
- 39% of youth in the smaller communities were current smokers, compared to 28% of youth in the regional centres and 15% of youth in Yellowknife.

These differences in current smoking rates are presented in Figures 1 through 3.

Figure 1: Current Smokers by Age and Gender (Ages 10-17)

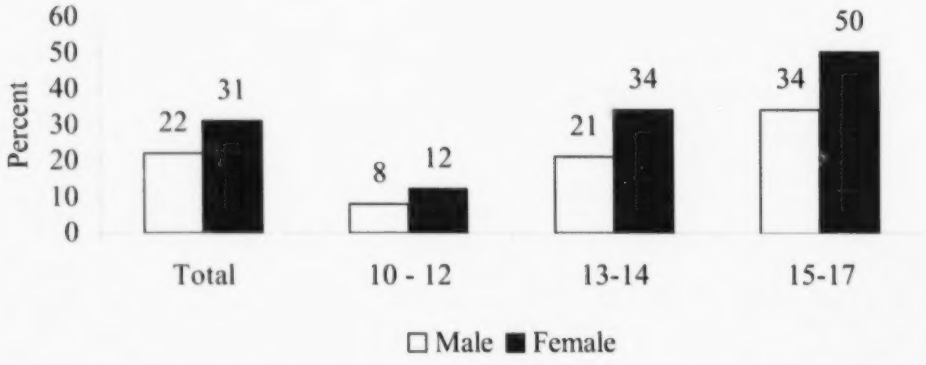


Figure 2: Type of Smoker by Ethncity (Ages 10-17)

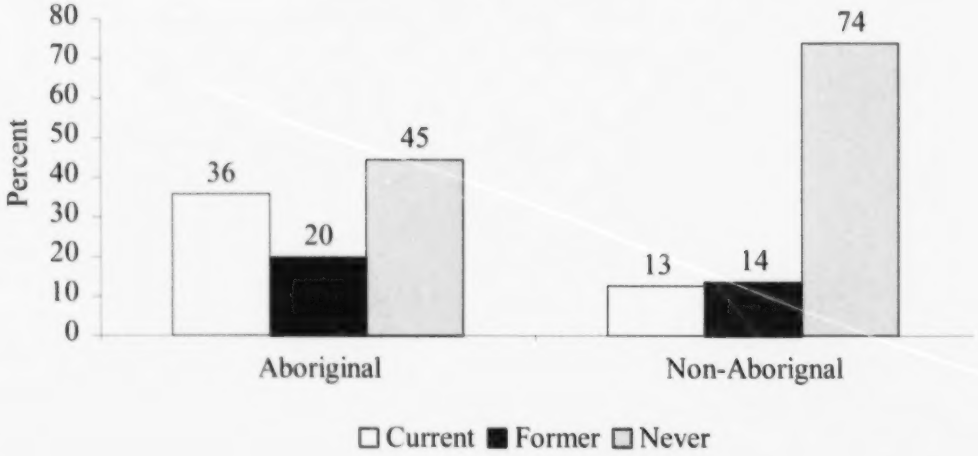
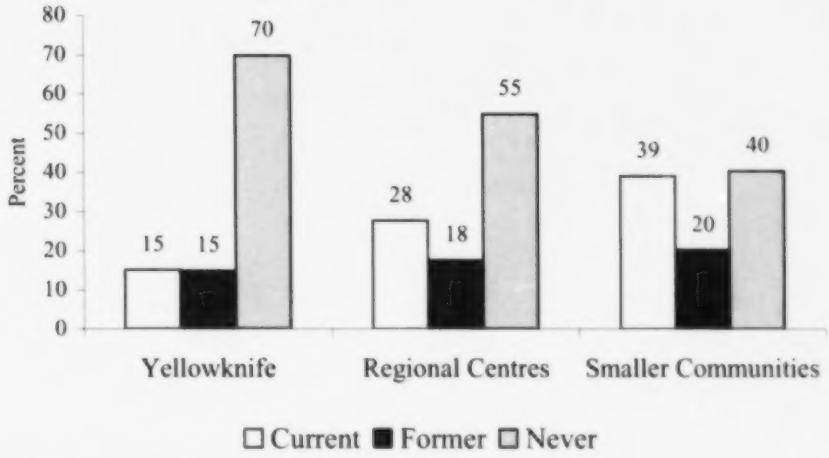


Figure 3: Type of Smoker by Community (Ages 10-17)



A Closer Look at Current Smokers

Current smokers can be divided into three categories: daily smokers, occasional smokers and beginning smokers – see Appendix 1 for a definition of each category. Overall, 11% of NWT youth between the ages of 10 and 17 were daily smokers, 6% were occasional smokers and 9% were beginning to smoke. Younger smokers were more likely to be beginners while older smokers were more likely to be smoke daily. An estimated 9% of youth between 10 and 14 years of age were beginning smokers, 4% were occasional smokers and another 4% were daily smokers. Meanwhile, 23% of youth between 15 and 17 were daily smokers, 10% were occasional smokers and 9% were in the beginning stages of smoking (see figure 4).

Figure 4: Type of Current Smoker by Age (Ages 10 - 17)

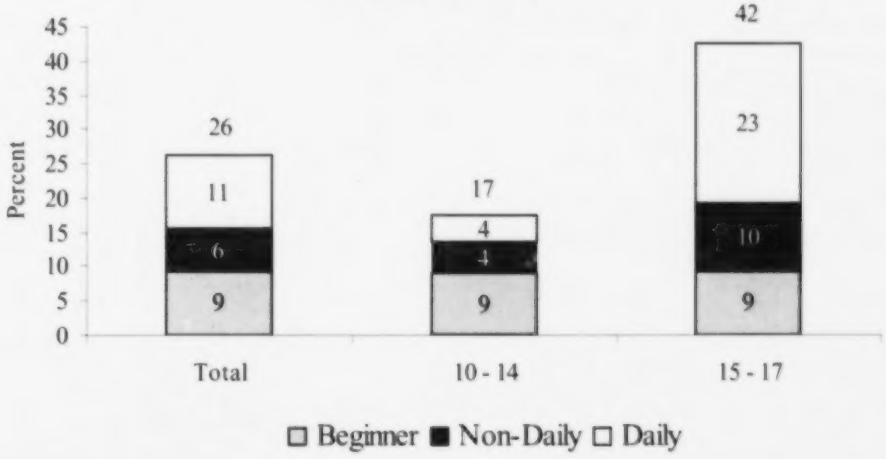
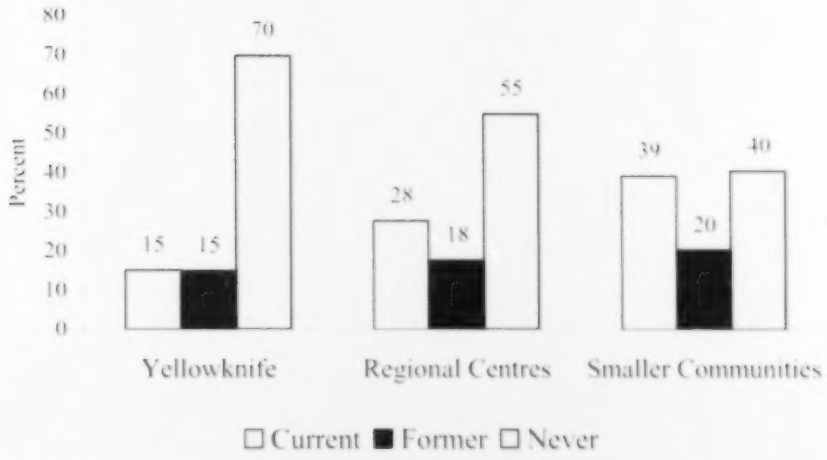


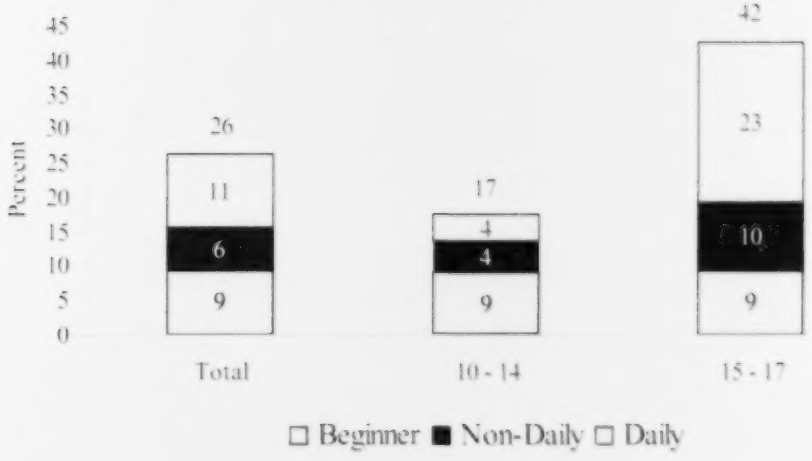
Figure 3: Type of Smoker by Community (Ages 10-17)



A Closer Look at Current Smokers

Current smokers can be divided into three categories: daily smokers, occasional smokers and beginning smokers – see Appendix 1 for a definition of each category. Overall, 11% of NWT youth between the ages of 10 and 17 were daily smokers, 6% were occasional smokers and 9% were beginning to smoke. Younger smokers were more likely to be beginners while older smokers were more likely to be smoke daily. An estimated 9% of youth between 10 and 14 years of age were beginning smokers, 4% were occasional smokers and another 4% were daily smokers. Meanwhile, 23% of youth between 15 and 17 were daily smokers, 10% were occasional smokers and 9% were in the beginning stages of smoking (see figure 4).

Figure 4: Type of Current Smoker by Age (Ages 10 - 17)



How Much Do Daily Smokers Smoke?

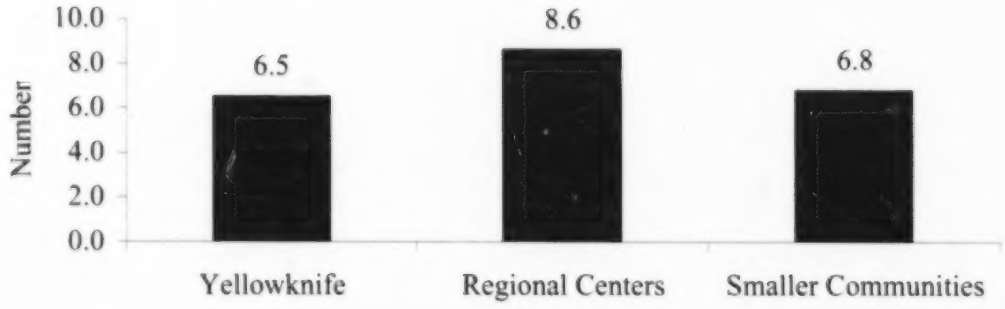
Youth daily smokers smoked an average of 7.2 cigarettes per day in 2002. This average amount was lower than the 9.1 cigarettes smoked per day in 1999.

There were differences in the average number of cigarettes smoked per day along gender, ethnicity, and community types. The average number of cigarettes smoked per day was higher amongst daily smokers who were male, aboriginal, or and from the regional centres:

- male daily smokers smoked an average of 7.5 cigarettes per day, compared to 7.0 cigarettes for female daily smokers;
- aboriginal daily smokers smoked an average of 7.3 cigarettes per day, compared to 6.7 cigarettes for non-aboriginal daily smokers; and
- daily smokers in the regional centres smoked an average of 8.6 cigarettes per day, compared to an average of 6.8 cigarettes per day for daily smokers in the smaller communities, and 6.5 cigarettes per day for daily smokers in Yellowknife.

The difference in the amount smoked per day by daily smokers by community type is presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Average Number of Cigarettes Smoked per Day by Daily Smokers (Ages 10-17)



When Do Youth Become Daily Smokers?

When daily smokers were asked how old they were when they first smoked cigarettes everyday for at least seven days in a row, the average age given was 12.9 years of age.

- The average age given by male daily smokers was 13.2 years and the average age given by female daily smokers was 12.7 years.

Where Do Youth Get Cigarettes?

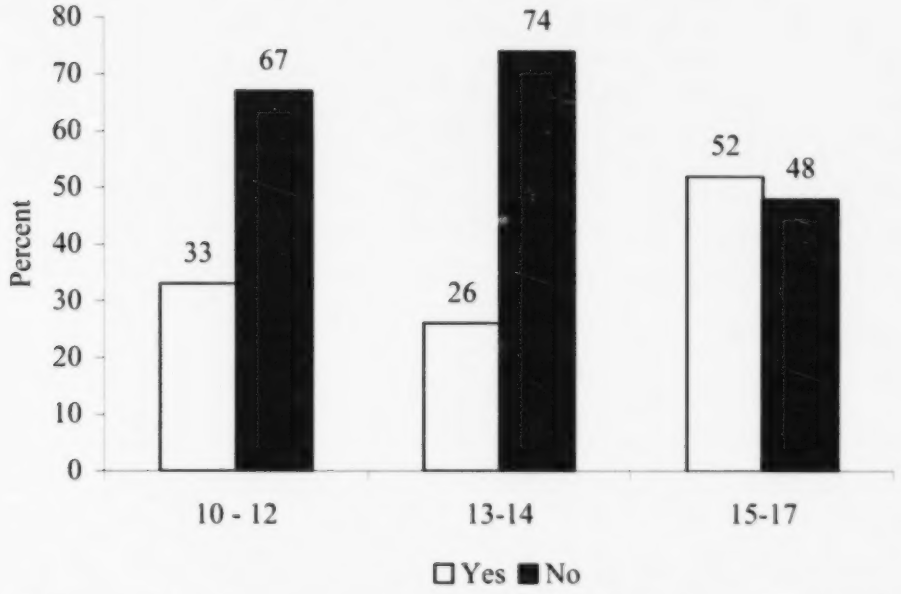
More than one-third of youth (42%) who were current smokers purchased their cigarettes in stores, despite it being illegal for them to do so in the NWT. The 2002 rate of 42% was down from the 46% reported in 1999.

There were differences in the number of youth current smokers who purchased their cigarettes in stores along age and community types. The rate of purchasing cigarettes in stores was higher amongst youth who were older, or from Yellowknife or the smaller communities:

- 52% of 15-17 year olds purchased their cigarettes in stores, compared to 33% of 10-12 year olds and 26% of 13-14 year olds; and
- 46% of youth in Yellowknife and 44% of youth in the smaller communities purchased their cigarettes in stores, compared to 39% of youth in the regional centres.

The difference in the percentage of youth current smokers who purchased their cigarettes in stores by age category is presented in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Current Smokers Who Purchased Cigarettes in Stores by Age (Ages 10-17)



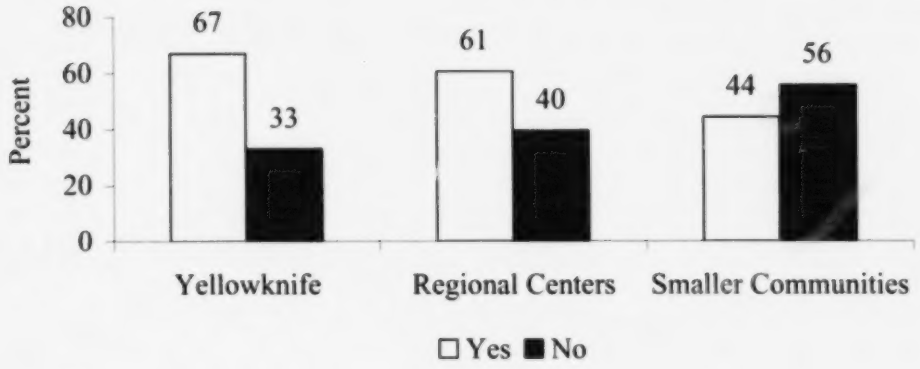
One suspected reason why a large number of youth purchased their cigarettes in stores is that the store clerks selling cigarettes failed to ask youth their ages. Almost one-half of these youth who were current smokers (46%) reported that the store clerks had not asked their ages prior to the attempted purchase of tobacco. The 2002 rate of 46% was lower than the 62% reported in 1999.

There were differences regarding whether youth were asked their ages prior to the attempted purchase of cigarettes along community types. The rate of clerks asking youth their ages prior to tobacco purchase was higher amongst youth from Yellowknife or the regional centres:

- 67% of youth in Yellowknife and 61% of youth in the regional centres were asked their ages prior to the attempted purchase of cigarettes, compared to 44% of youth in the smaller communities.

This difference is presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Asked Ages Prior to Purchase (Ages 10-17)



Do Youth Use Chewing Tobacco and Snuff?

Very few youth were using chewing tobacco (1%) or snuff (1%) at the time of the survey. This small usage rate was lower than the 2% usage rate for both types of tobacco in 1999, and lower than the 2% who reported using chewing tobacco and the 4% who reported using snuff in 1993.

This very low prevalence seems to indicate that youth were not using either type of tobacco to any great extent.

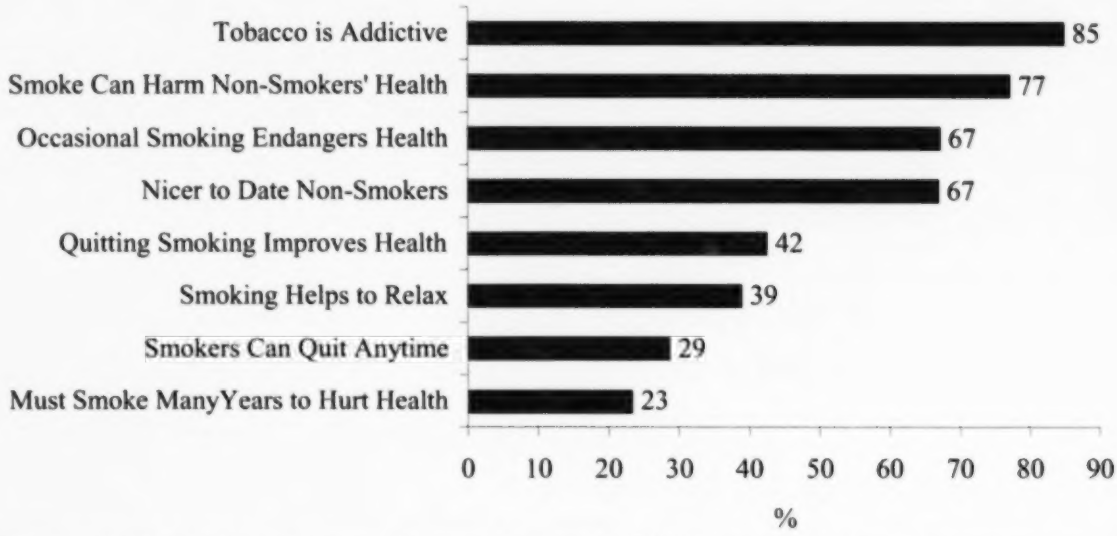
YOUTH BELIEFS ABOUT SMOKING

This section of the report presents the summary findings of beliefs about smoking amongst youth in the NWT. The topics covered include: youth views on smoking and views as to why people begin to smoke.

Views on Smoking

The survey results highlight a number of important views that youth hold about smoking (see Figure 8). While a majority of youth acknowledged the harmful health effects of smoking and second-hand smoke, there were still many youth who believed that quitting was easy and that people had to smoke for many years before it would hurt their health.

Figure 8: Beliefs About Smoking (Ages 10-17)



Other lesser-held views (not shown in Figure 8) include the beliefs that: smoking helps you to stay slim (17%); smokers have more friends (16%); smoking helps to relive boredom (14%); and smoking is cool (4%).

There were differences in youth views on smoking along age, gender, and community types. Younger smokers were the least knowledgeable about the harmful effects of smoking and the difficulty of quitting smoking, while older smokers believed that smoking was relaxing:

- 84% of 15-17 year olds and 78% of 13-14 year olds thought that second-hand smoke was harmful to non-smokers, compared to 70% of 10-12 year olds;
- 34% of 10-12 year olds thought that smokers can quit anytime they want, compared to 26% of 15-17 year olds and 24 % of 13-14 year olds;
- 28% of 10-12 year olds thought that people have to smoke for many years before it will hurt their health, compared to 25% of 13-14 year olds and 17% of 15-17 year olds; and
- 50% of 15-17 year olds thought that smoking helps people to relax, compared to 43% for 13-14 year olds, and 26% for 10-12 year olds.

Female smokers were more knowledgeable about the harmful health effects of smoking and the addictive nature of tobacco, yet they also believed that it was easy to quit and that smoking helps you stay slim:

- 87% of females believed that people can become addicted to tobacco, compared to 82% of males;
- 33% of females believed that smokers can quit anytime they want, compared to 24% of males;
- 26% of females believed that people have to smoke for many years before it will hurt their health, compared to 21% of males; and
- 19% of females believed that smoking helps people to stay slim, compared to 15% of males.

Youth in Yellowknife or the regional centres were more knowledgeable than youth in the smaller communities about the harmful health effects of smoking and the difficulty of quitting smoking:

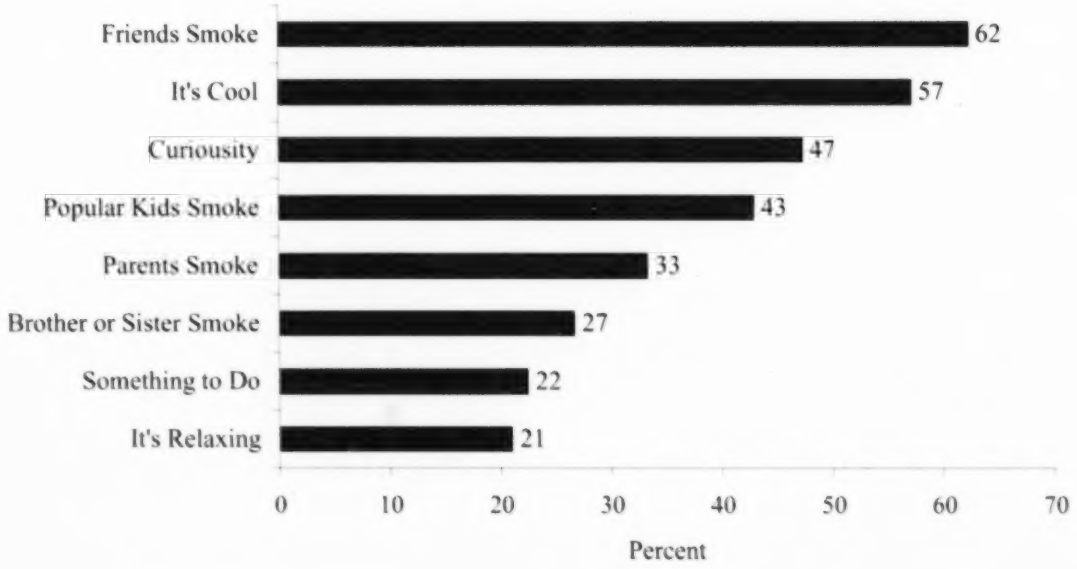
- 31% of youth in the smaller communities believed that people have to smoke for many years before it will hurt their health, compared to 21% of in the regional centres and 19% in Yellowknife;
- 85% of youth in Yellowknife and 78% of youth in the regional centres believed that second-hand smoke is harmful to non-smokers, compared to 67% of youth in the smaller communities;
- 71% of youth in Yellowknife and 71% of youth in the regional centres believed that an occasional cigarette can be harmful to your health, compared to 60% of youth in the smaller communities; and
- 35% of youth in the smaller communities believed that smokers can quit anytime they want, compared to 27% in the regional centres and 25% in Yellowknife.

Views on Why Youth Start to Smoke

The survey results highlight youth views on why young people start to smoke (see Figure 9). The top reasons indicated as to why youth start to smoke were mostly "social" in nature, followed by learned behaviours within the family.

Other less common reasons not shown in Figure 9 include: "because it's not allowed" (15%) and "to lose weight" (13%).

Figure 9: Reasons Why Youth Start to Smoke (Ages 10-17)



There were differences in the perceived reasons as to why young people start to smoke along age, gender, and community types. Younger smokers felt that youth start smoking for social approval, while older youth felt that youth start smoking because it was something to do and it was relaxing:

- 71% of 10-12 year olds indicated that young people start to smoke because it was cool, compared to 65% of 13-14 year olds, and 36% of 15-17 year olds;
- 51% of 10-12 year olds indicated that young people start to smoke because the popular kids smoke, compared to 44 % of 13-14 year olds, and 33% of 15-17 year olds;
- 28% of 15-17 year olds indicated that young people start to smoke because it was something to do, compared to 23% of 13-14 year olds, and 17% of 10-12 year olds; and
- 28% of 15-17 year olds indicated that young people start to smoke because it was relaxing, compared to 24% of 13-14 year olds, and 13% of 10-12 year olds.

Female smokers (more so than males) felt that youth start smoking for social approval reasons and out of a sense of curiosity:

- 65% of females indicated that young people start to smoke because their friends smoke, compared to 59% of males;
- 46% of females indicated that young people start to smoke because the popular kids smoke, compared to 39% of males;
- 52% of females indicated that young people start to smoke because of curiosity; compared to 42% of males; and
- 25% of females indicated that young people start to smoke because it was something to do, compared to 19% of males.

Youth in Yellowknife (more so than youth in the regional centres or the smaller communities) felt that youth start smoking out of a sense of curiosity, for social approval and because it was a learned behaviour within the family:

- 57% of youth in Yellowknife indicated that young people start to smoke out of curiosity, compared to 45% in the regional centres and 35% in the smaller communities;
- 49% of youth in Yellowknife indicated that young people start to smoke because the popular kids smoke, compared to 38% in both the regional centres and the smaller communities; and
- 37% of youth in Yellowknife indicated that young people start to smoke because their mother or father smokes, compared to 33% in the regional centres and 28% in the smaller communities.

Parents Smoking Behaviour

Parents smoking behavior may also impact on the choices made by their children. The odds of being a current smoker was 2.83 times higher for youth where at least one parent smoked compared to those where neither of the parents smoked. Thirty four percent of youth who indicated one of their parents smoke were smokers themselves. Meanwhile, just 15% of those who said neither parent smoked were themselves current smokers.

QUITTING SMOKING AND SMOKING INTENTION

This section of the report presents the summary findings of attempts at quitting smoking and smoking intention amongst youth in the NWT. The topics covered include: attempts at quitting smoking by current smokers age 15-17 in the past 6 months; the views of youth who were currently non-smokers on whether they thought they would smoke this year; and whether all youth thought they would be smoking in one year's time.

Current Smokers Who Tried to Quit in the Past Six Months

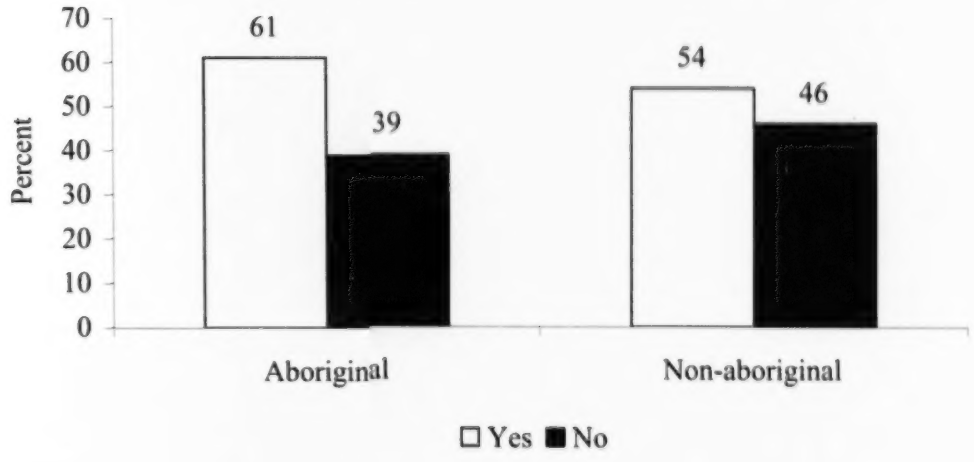
The majority of current smokers (59%) in the 15-17 year age range had tried to quit smoking in the past six months. However, the proportion of successful quitters among those who have smoked 100 cigarettes or more in their lifetime in this age group is just 8%.

There were differences in attempts at quitting smoking along gender, ethnicity, and community types. Youth who were female, aboriginal, or who were from the regional centres or the smaller communities were more likely to have tried to quit smoking in the past six months:

- 62% of females indicated that they had tried quitting in the past six months compared to 54% of males;
- 61% of aboriginal youth indicated that they had tried quitting in the past six months compared to 54% of non-aboriginal youth; and
- 66% of youth in the regional centres and 59% in the smaller communities had tried quitting in the past 6 months, compared to 53% of youth in Yellowknife.

The difference in attempts at quitting smoking in the past six months by ethnicity type is presented in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Current Smokers Who Tried to Quit in the Past Six Months by Ethnicity (Ages 15-17)



Reasons for Quitting

Former smokers who had smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their lifetime reported the following as main reasons for quitting:

- concern about future health (mentioned by 64%);
- change of lifestyle, e.g., increased physical activity (mentioned by 51%); and
- pressure to quit from family members (mentioned by 19%).

Non-Smokers Views on Whether They Would Smoke This Year

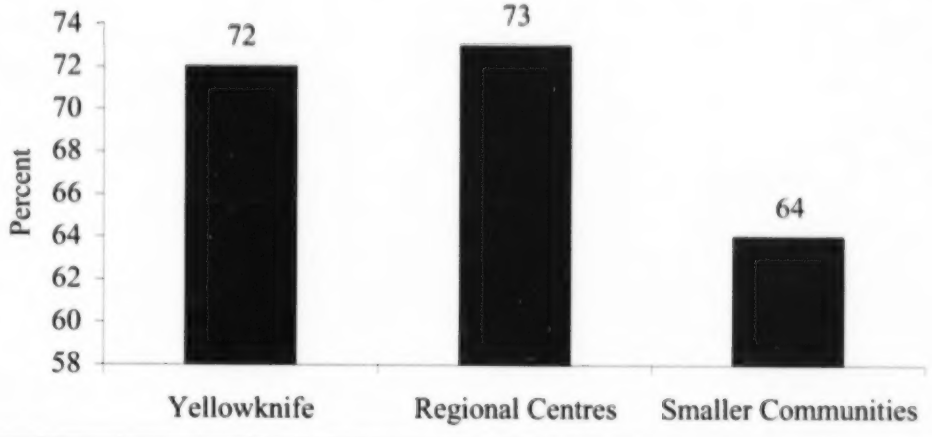
Very few who were current non-smokers indicated that they would take up smoking this year. Less than 1% thought that they would definitely smoke in the coming year, 5% thought that they would probably smoke this year, 14% thought they would probably not smoke this year, 70% thought they would definitely not smoke this year and 11% did not know whether they would smoke this year or not.

There were differences in smoking intentions along age, ethnicity, and community types. Youth who were younger, who were non-aboriginal, or who were from the regional centres or Yellowknife were more likely to indicate that they would definitely not smoke this year:

- 76% of 10-12 year olds indicated that they would definitely not smoke this year, compared to 67% of 15-17 year olds and 63% of 13-14 year olds;
- 73% of non-aboriginal youth indicated that they would definitely not smoke this year, compared to 65% of aboriginal youth; and
- 73% of youth in the regional centres and 72% of youth in Yellowknife indicated that they would definitely not smoke this year, compared to 64% of youth in the smaller communities.

The difference in smoking intention by community type is presented in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Definitely Not Smoke This Year by Community Type (Ages 10-17)



Smoking One Year From Now

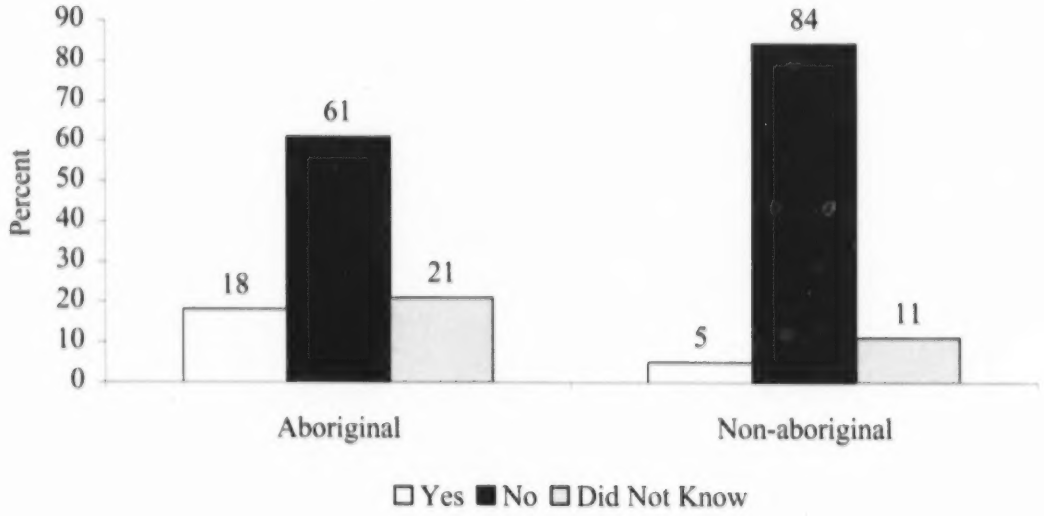
The majority of all youth surveyed (71%) thought they would not be smoking one year from now, 14% thought they would be smoking one year from now, and 16% were undecided about whether they would be smoking one year from now.

There were differences whether youth thought they would be smoking one year from now along age, gender, ethnicity, and community types. Youth who were younger, male, non-aboriginal, or who were from Yellowknife or the regional centres were more likely to have thought they would not be smoking one year from now:

- 80% of 10-12 year olds indicated that they would not be smoking one year from now, compared to 66% of 13-14 year olds and 64% of 15-17 year olds;
- 75% of males indicated that they would not be smoking one year from now, compared to 66% of females;
- 84% of non-aboriginal youth indicated that they would not be smoking one year from now, compared to 61% of aboriginal youth; and
- 80% of youth in Yellowknife and 70% of youth in the regional centres indicated that they would not be smoking one year from now, compared to 59% of youth in the smaller communities.

The differences in youth views on whether they would be smoking in one year's time by ethnicity type is presented in Figure 12.

Figure 12: Whether Smoking in One Year's Time by Ethnicity (Ages 10-17)



SCHOOL TOBACCO EDUCATION PROGRAMS

This section of the report presents the summary findings of school tobacco education programs aimed at youth smoking. The topics covered include whether youth were taught: the facts about smoking; the reasons why young people smoke; and how to say "no" to tobacco.

The Facts About Smoking

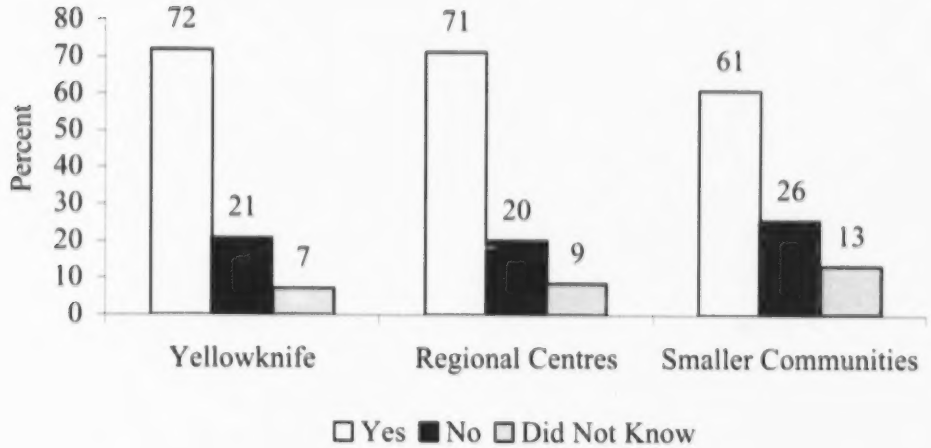
Most youth (68%) reported that they had been taught in school in the past year about the health problems caused by smoking, 22% reported that they had not been taught such facts in school, and 10% were not sure whether they had been taught such facts or not.

There were differences in whether youth were taught the facts about smoking along age and community types. Youth who were younger, or who were from Yellowknife or the regional centres were more likely to report that they had been taught such facts in school:

- 72% of 10-12 year olds and 70% of 13-14 year olds reported that they had been taught the facts about smoking, compared to 63% of 15-17 year olds; and
- 72% of youth in Yellowknife and 71% of youth in the regional centres reported that they had been taught the facts about smoking, compared to 61% of youth in the smaller communities.

The difference in youth being taught the facts about smoking by community type is presented in Figure 13.

Figure 13: Taught the Facts About Smoking (Ages 10-17)



How to Say "No" to Tobacco

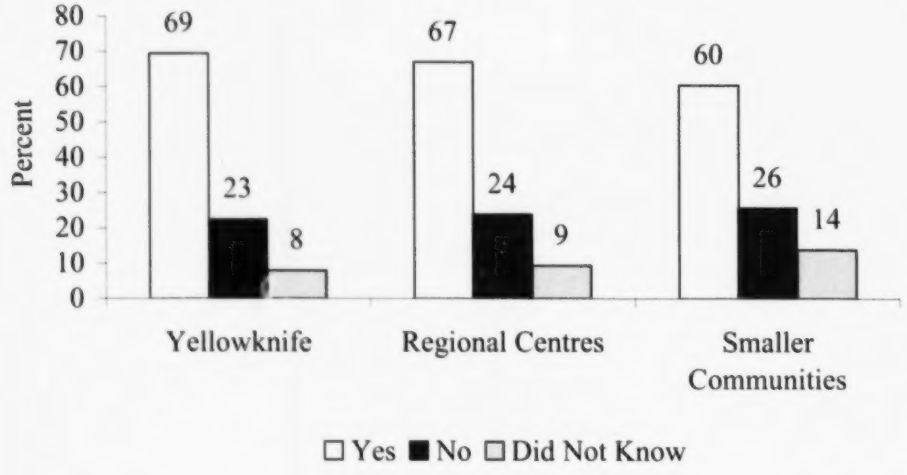
The majority of NWT youth (66%) reported that they had been taught in school in the past year to say "no" to tobacco, 24% reported that they had not been taught such skills, and 10% reported that they did not know whether or not they had been taught to say no to tobacco.

There were differences in whether youth were taught to say "no" to tobacco along age and community types. Youth who were younger, or who were from Yellowknife or the regional centres were more likely to report that they had been taught such skills in school:

- 73% of 13-14 year olds and 73% of 10-12 year olds reported that they had been taught to say "no" to tobacco, compared to 53% of 15-17 year olds; and
- 69% of youth in Yellowknife and 67% of youth in the regional centres reported that they had been taught to say "no" to tobacco, compared to 60% of youth in the smaller communities.

The difference in youth being taught to say not to tobacco by community type is presented in Figure 14.

Figure 14: Taught to Say No to Tobacco (Ages 10-17)



CONCLUSION

At 26%, the rate of youth smoking in the NWT remains well above the national average and has not decreased substantially from the previous school survey of 1999. This continued high rate is cause for concern. Results from the survey provide some clear direction for public health programs at both the territorial and community levels.

Between ages 10-12, only 10% of youth are current smokers, but by 15-17 years, 42% are either regular daily smokers or are experimenting with the habit. The significant increase in the number of smokers during the early teen years suggests that preventing the uptake of smoking behaviour in 10 to 15 year olds should be an important area of focus.

Another factor supporting an earlier focus is the addictive nature of tobacco. There is evidence that while many youth may try to quit, most are unsuccessful: 59% of current smokers 15-17 years of age reported trying to quit in the last six months, however, the proportion of successful quitters among those who have smoked 100 cigarettes or more in their lifetime in this age group is just 8%. This finding is consistent with that of other youth research which shows that teen smokers are least likely to be successful in their quit attempts.

Cigarettes are easily available to young smokers. Despite the fact that it is illegal to do so under federal law, 42% of current youth smokers reported purchasing their cigarettes in local stores. Almost half of those purchasing tobacco in stores reported that store clerks had not asked their age. The limited and sporadic presence of federal enforcement officers in NWT communities and the lack of a sustained education program for retailers are at least partially responsible for these results. Improving community level understanding and support of the federal law prohibiting tobacco sales to minors may be the most effective way to make tobacco less accessible to youth.

More effort needs to be directed to the denormalization of smoking in smaller communities. The rate of youth smoking in smaller communities is significantly higher than in regional centres or in Yellowknife. This pattern is similar to the smoking behaviours of NWT adults. In addition, small communities tend not to have by-laws or policies in place that prohibit smoking in public places such as restaurants, stores, arenas, municipal buildings, etc. Such bylaws would aid in denormalizing smoking in all age groups.

And finally, more aboriginal youth are smoking, regardless of community size. Specific initiatives targeting this group are essential.

Over the next two years, a media communications plan that focuses primarily on youth ages 10-15 will be implemented including a variety of activities targeting youth. The *2002 NWT School Tobacco Survey* provides a good range of baseline data that can be used to help evaluate these initiatives.

APPENDIX I: DEFINITIONS

The following are the definitions for the various types of smokers as used in this report:

Current Smoker: Someone who was smoking at the time of the survey. Includes:

- "Daily Smoker" – someone who has smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their lifetime and currently smokes every day
- "Non-daily Smoker" – someone who has smoked at least 100 cigarettes in their lifetime but does not currently smoke every day
- "Beginning Smoker" – someone who has smoked between 1 and 99 cigarettes in their lifetime and has smoked in the past 30 days

Former Smoker: Some one who has smoked at least one whole cigarette in the past, but did not smoke during the past 30 days. Includes:

- "Former Smoker" – someone who has smoked 100 or more cigarettes in their lifetime and has not smoked during the past 30 days
- "Past experimenter" – someone who has smoked between 1 and 99 cigarettes in their lifetime and has not smoked in last 30 days

Never Smoked: Lifetime abstainer – someone who has smoked less than one whole cigarette in their lifetime.